
9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?

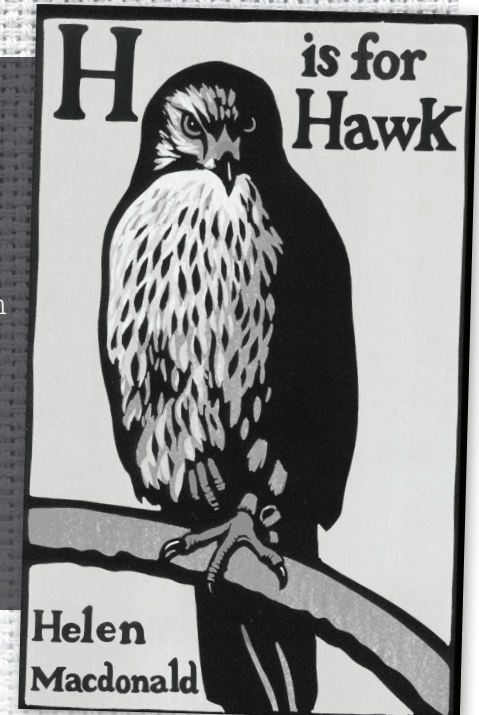
10. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?

Discussion Questions

“An elegantly written amalgam of nature writing, personal memoir, literary portrait and an examination of bereavement.... It illuminates unexpected things in unexpected ways.”

- Guy Gavriel Kay,
Washington Post

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Helen Macdonald is a writer, poet, illustrator, historian, and naturalist, and an affiliated research scholar at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. She also worked as a Research Fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge.

She is the author of a cultural history of falcons, titled *Falcon*, and three collections of poetry. As a professional falconer, she assisted with the management of raptor research and conservation projects across Eurasia. Her memoir *H Is for Hawk* was published in 2014. (From the publisher.)

Book Summary

When Helen Macdonald's father died suddenly on a London street, she was devastated. An experienced falconer—Helen had been captivated by hawks since childhood—she'd never before been tempted to train one of the most vicious predators, the goshawk.

But in her grief, she saw that the goshawk's fierce and feral temperament mirrored her own. Resolving to purchase and raise the deadly creature as a means to cope with her loss, she adopted Mabel, and turned to the guidance of *The Once and Future King* author T.H. White's chronicle *The Goshawk* to begin her challenging endeavor. Projecting herself "in the hawk's wild mind to tame her" tested the limits of Macdonald's humanity and changed her life.

Heart-wrenching and humorous, this book is an unflinching account of bereavement and a unique look at the magnetism of an extraordinary beast, with a parallel examination of a legendary writer's eccentric falconry. Obsession, madness, memory, myth, and history combine to achieve a distinctive blend of nature writing and memoir from an outstanding literary innovator. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

- 1.** If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ..

A.) What observations are made in the book? Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
B.) Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
C.) What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?

- 2.** What is the central idea discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?

- 3.** Do the issues affect your life? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?

- 4.** What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual—based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?

- 5.** What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?

- 6.** What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?

- 7.** What solutions does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?

- 8.** How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
